2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

when the mosquitoes are really bad the cattle are tied for the night in the open, generally in the centre of the village. Fires of dried cow-dung are kept smouldering all night, and the herdsmen smear themselves with the ashes. In the dry season when the grass gives out the young men and boys drive the cattle long distances to fresh pastures; the Shilluk of the White Nile cross to the eastern bank, those of the Sobat migrate to the lagoons to the south of Sobat.

Fish are speared and trapped, and the hippopotamus, the flesh of which is greatly esteemed, is harpooned. The Shilluk, who are by no means expert trackers, hunt by surrounding an area and spearing the animals as they attempt to escape from the contracting circle, but game procured in this manner plays only a small part in their diet.

The Shilluk are excellent craftsmen. The thatching of the royal shrines and those of Nyakang is perhaps the best in the riverain portion of the Sudan, and this applies equally to their iron work, though they do not extract the metal from the ore but obtain it by trade—formerly from the Dinka, now from the white man. Their spears are the best that we saw in the southern Sudan. There is no special group of smiths, and iron-workers are not despised. They make good but not remarkable pottery. Their dug-out canoes are necessarily small, as the only wood is the *doleib* palm (*Borassus flabellifer*). In the north, where other wood is available in small quantities, the sides of the canoe are commonly heightened by built-on strips; possibly this practice is modern, but it is not absolutely new, as we noted it more than twenty years ago. Besides canoes, the Shilluk make small rafts of ambatch which resemble the reed rafts of the ancient Egyptians.

Regulation of Public Life

The Shilluk king is absolute head—temporal and spiritual—of a state whose territory is divided into a number of provinces, each administered by a chief directly responsible to the sovereign and acting as his proxy. We are indebted to Mr. Heasty for the following account of the areas into which the country is divided. The two main divisions are Lwak and Gar. The former comprises all the country south of and including the capital Fashoda, with its provincial capital Kwom, and here resides one of the great territorial chiefs mentioned

3:Westermann E-5 (1$10) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

stones are collected by the Arabs of Kordofan about the numerous mountains there. The amount of labour required to work them into the proper shape accounts for their high value, as well as their scarcity among the Shilluks. 439

A Shilluk man hardly leaves his home without carrying a spear or two, and a club. They have two kinds of spears, one whose blade has the form of a laurel-leaf, another with a cylindric blade, ending in a sharp point, the surface being either smooth or barbed. The shafts are of common wood without any ornaments. The spears often have a tuft of short ostrich feathers or of wool, near the butt. The cylindrical (round) spears are used not only as arms, but also in fishing. Besides the spears, they have two species of clubs, at least one of which a man always carries with him. One is simply a thick stick about one meter long, and heavy at one end. The other is about two feet and a half long, made in one solid piece of hard, heavy wood, with a big round knob at one end. ARMS 411

The Shilluks are a haughty, proud people. They are much inclined to consider themselves and everything belonging to them as superior to the strangers, including the white men. "The things of the Shilluks are good, and the things of the strangers are bad", is a common saying among them. They do not in any way want the foreigners and their mode of life. This strong disinclination is not only due to their innate character, but also to the evil experiences they have had with Arabs, Turks, Abyssinians, the Dervishes etc. CHARACTER 157 186

The well-founded feeling of suspicion and even of contempt for white people will grow less intensive or may disappear altogether in consequence of the peaceful intercourse they now have with the representatives of the white race. In conversing with a white man they at the best treat him as their equal, but hardly ever as their superior. It requires therefore considerable tact to deal with them. Once having gained confidence they are frank, open-minded, and always ready for a joke, but they are also quickly offended.

As warriors the Shilluks are brave; they make excellent soldiers in colonial troops, and are renowned as the best soldiers in the Sudan; generally they become really attached to their leaders, whether white or black. 181

Working for the white man is done only in times of dearth, when no food is obtainable in other ways. But in spite of this difficulty the mission has, during the last few years, had remarkable results in educating the natives to regular voluntary work. — If one sees a Shilluk standig for an hour or longer almost without ever moving, except now and then scratching his head or chewing his tooth-stick, or if one meets them lying in the ashes of the village place for hours together, one might believe them to be an extremely lazy people. But this would be only partly right. Indeed during the dry season they have not much work 461 [469] Pal.

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

with rather long legs, a slender body, and large horns. The horns, while young, are dressed into most manifold strange forms, this being the business of a particular craftsman, the "dresser of horns". Sometimes in a large herd one sees hardly any cattle with the horns in their natural shape. An illustration of how cattle are cherished and almost regarded as personal beings is the fact that they have about 40 different names for cattle, according to their colour, the configuration or size of the horns, etc. Vide page 107. — Domestic animals are not butchered, except when sick or exceedingly old. Oxen and goats are killed on festal occasions, such as funeral or marriage meals, or as sacrifices to Nyikang and Jwok. Neither do they sell cattle; for a stranger it is practically impossible to purchase a cow or an ox. The price of a cow is about £ 5; an ox is half the value of a cow which has calved; a young heifer has double the value of a cow. — Slaying a cow is done by stabbing it with a spear in the nape, so that the aorta is pierced. The blood is collected and cooked as food.

The cows are milked morning and evening, usually by boys, sometimes also by old men, but not by women, the latter having nothing to do with cattle. The quantity of milk obtained is but poor. A gourd is the usual milk vessel. These are washed with cow-urine, which gives the milk an unpleasant flavour. They also wash their hands in cow-urine; but they do not mix the milk with it, as is the custom with Dinkas and Nuers.

Each village possesses a common cow-shed, but into it the herd is put at night during the rainy season only, when the mosquitoes are very bad. The rest of the year they are kraaled in the open yard, where they are tied with ropes to short pegs driven into the ground. This cattle-court is a semi-circular enclosure; at the entrance to it there is a small circular place built of corn stalks and covered with ashes, in which the young men who watch the herd sleep. A fire of dried cow dung is kept smouldering all night in this place. Sick cattle are nursed in the cow-shed during the daytime, to keep them out of the sun and away from food, but not in the night, unless it is the season when all the cattle are housed. Many cattle die every year, from intestinal worms and other diseases. A considerable number of cows are barren.

The cattle are herded by young men and boys. As soon as the dew has dried off the grass, the herd is driven into the pasture. During the dry season, when grass is getting rare, the herds migrate into the lower and swampy parts of the country, where the grass is still flourishing; the Shilluks along the White Nile cross over to the east bank; likewise the cattle of the Sobat Shilluks descend to the lagoons south of the Sobat. So in both cases they have to cross the rivers, which is, on account of the many crocodiles living in them, not undangerous, and is therefore done with much care and accompanied by

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

221 233 578 weighty ceremonies, in order to keep the crocodiles away; this forms an important part of the duties of the witch-doctor; vide page 172. All the youths and boys over ten years accompany the herds, leaving their homes for several weeks or even months, and enjoying the free life in temporary huts. When after the first rains the new grass springs up, they return home. The struggle for the best pasture grounds very often becomes the cause of bitter quarrels, and has in the past not unfrequently led to tribal wars.

231 GOATS The Shilluk goats have rather high legs, they almost unvariably look thin and not well fed; their colour is mostly grey, but black ones too are not unSHEEP frequent. The sheep have no wool, but hair. They have a kind of mane on shoulder, neck and breast, the rest of the body being covered with short hair.
FOWLS Most sheep are white, brown-white, or black-white. — A race of small fowls is kept, but the natives do not make much of them; many chickens are stolen
DOGS by snakes and other small animals. — Dogs are very numerous, they are a kind of greyhound, of red or yellow colour, and have a black, long snout. They are exceedingly quick in running and most clever in jumping. They overtake gazelles with easiness, and are much used in hunting.

224 HUNTING Hunting is practised by all men occasionally, but is, as a rule, not very [411] successful. They use spears, clubs, and traps in killing or catching animals. Sometimes, chiefly in procuring animals whose skins form part of the revenue of the king, all the people of a village assemble for a hunting match, vide page 125; a large circle is formed, and the animals inside it, when wishing to escape, are killed. When an animal is wounded, but runs away, they will persecute it for [643] days, till it breaks down. The skin of a killed leopard belongs to the king, and could, at least formerly, be worn by privates only by special permission of the king. A lion's skin is considered as evil, and is not worn.

225 Hippopotamus hunting is done by combined parties in canoes, harpooning the animal and dispatching him with spears, when he comes to the surface to breathe.

226 FISHING Their way of fishing is that with the round barbed spear, and with traps, which are made of corn stalks and reed. Fish-spearing is done in muddy water, where they cannot see anything below the surface, and therefore cannot aim. But nevertheless by this rude mode they sometimes have good results, the fish in the White Nile and Sobat being numerous and large. Sometimes they carry on fishing during the night time by holding burning grass-torches over the water, and thus enticing the fish, which are then speared. In recent time nets [177] and fishhooks are bought from the white people, and are employed in fishing.

463 HANDICRAFTS The Shilluks practise a great number of crafts, which are carried on in families for generations, the father and mother imparting their skill to their children.

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

retreat. Around our house they went in a regular stampede, and forming in a line again in front of the house for another charge.
This they repeated a number of times. Then a crowd of women, who had followed their husbands and sweethearts to battle, acted the part of foe, only to be overcome by the brave warriors and driven back. This part was very amusing. One old body with great bravery marched out and charged, using her pipe as her weapon. The men were a bit rough in driving her back, and she was evidently afraid her dear pipe would come to grief, so she took it inside our house and when next we saw her she was in the thick of a fray with a long weed as her weapon of offence and defence".]

The dry season is also the time for travelling. Relatives pay mutual visits, and marriageable young men go to the Nuers and Dinkas with spears, wire, stuffs, and dura, which they exchange for sheep and calves.

IV. RELIGION.

In the religion of the Shilluks three components ary clearly distinguishable: 1. Jwok *(jwɔ̀k)* or God; 2. Nyikang *(Ńɟìkàŋ̀ɔ̀)*, the progenitor and national hero of the Shilluks; 3. ajwogo *(àjwɔ̀ɟgɔ́)*, the witch doctor or sorcerer. These three do not exist separate from each other, but have many relations amongst one another. There are still other forms of religious service, but they are not so prominent as the three mentioned.

"Jwok *(jwɔ̀k)* is a supreme being, residing above". Whether he is regarded as creator is not sure. According to the sayings of some natives he surely is, but it seems probable that this belief, if there is such a one, is young, and must be traced back to Mohammedan or Christian influences. — On certain occasions an ox is killed as a sacrifice to Jwok, though this is done more frequently to Nyikang; prayers are also offered to Jwok, but according to my information, they have only one prayer to Jwok (for which vide page 171), while to Nyikang there are many. "Praying" to Jwok is expressed by a different word from that which serves for designating a prayer to Nyikang; the first is *lāmɛ* "to pray"; its original meaning is probably: to conjure. In praying to Nyikang *kwachɛ* "to ask for, to beg" is used. While the prayers to Nyikang are sung, and accompanied by dances, that one to Jwok is only spoken, not sung, and not accompanied by dancing. Jwok has no visible symbols or temples, nor are the prayers to him offered by a priest or sorcerer, but by the chief or village-elder.

In the heart and mind of the Shilluk Jwok does not possess a deep-rooted rank. In some way they do attribute good and evil to him, and chiefly the

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

241 The Shulla has not yet learned to grow a very large variety of plants. His one main crop is dura, the kaffir corn of America.

[221] [249] All planting except tobacco, which is planted in small plots on the river bank during the dry season and watered by sprinkling the ground from a water jar, is done in the beginning of the rainy season.

A small amount of Indian corn is grown, most of which is eaten when in hard roasting ear. With the dura they plant a few beans, pumpkins, squashes, sesame and occasionally peanuts. No fruits of any kind are grown, and as [245] there are no wild fruits worthy the name, the Shulla has never known fruit until he has recently seen it in our garden or at the government stations.

The Shulla plants his dura in the same field year after year, until his crop fails once or twice. Then he hunts for a piece of high dry ground, preferably in the timber, for his early dura, and a low plain growing a certain rank wild grass for his late variety. He clears off the timber and digs up the grass for his new field which he tills, till another failure comes; if by that time his former field is growing of grass, he will return to its tillage.

His methods of farming are extremely crude, but in some respects accomplish good results. He has neither plough nor spade and never uses the mattock except to dig up the grass and bushes from new ground.

He prepares his ground by raking up the old stalks into piles with a deleib palm limb and burning them.

As soon as the rainy season opens and sufficient rain has fallen to soften the ground, he puts his seed to soak over night, so it will sprout the quicker, and thus more likely escape being eaten by white ants. With a long slender pole [412] which has one end shaped like the bowl of a spoon, he opens up the ground, and drops in the seeds. As he steps forward to make another hole, he presses down the earth over the seed with his foot. The hills are made promiscuously, but are usually some eighteen inches apart in all directions. He plants a large number of seeds in a hill, and later thins out and transplants where hills are missing.

Often he has to replant, for there are many enemies of the sprouting grain. Some years pests of rats devour it, even after it is several inches high. The golden-crested crane also pulls up much of the grain as it comes through the ground. And as before mentioned the white ant destroys the grain in the ground unless it sprouts quickly. But under normal conditions the grain comes up very soon after planting. And the warm rains and tropical sun cause the crop to shoot up like Johnnie's bean pole. Weeds come on quickly too, and so the Shulla begins hoeing his fields at once. It is the only real cultivation he does. His hoe is either a thin circular or rectangular piece of iron with a short [412] wooden handle.

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

ótét a food of dura, dainty.
mɔ́kɛ́ ńɔ̀kɛ̀ a food of dura.
àtɔ́ɔ́ch cooked dura.
àbɔ́k green roasted dura.
òmɔ̀t dura roasted, then soaked and mashed.
àwách dough.
mɔ̀ńàbúr a dura-food
ɟàbɔ̀ dura, soaked, and then kept till it sprouts; for making beer.
àɟɔ̀bóbò beer before it is strained.
mɔgɔ beer.
mɔń àtɟńɔ̀ strained beer.
yáwɔ̀ a kind of beer.

6. The seasons of the year.

yéy jɛ̀rìá about September, harvest of red dura.
átwɔ́ch about October; end of the harvest, people are waiting for the white dura to ripen.
ágwɔ́ɟrɔ̀ about November — December; harvest of white dura begins.
wɔ̀dɔ̀ December — January. Harvest of white dura continues.
lɟu hot season, January—February } no field-work
ɟɔ́ɟɔ́ń about March }
ɟɔ́kɔ̀ɟ about April, "mouth of rain", beginning of the rains.
shwɔ̀r about May—July, time for planting red dura.
ɟɔ́ɟrìá about July—September, beginning of harvest.

7. The months.

1. *ɣéɣ, ɔ́ɣ (wɔɣ)* about September.
2. *kɟɛ́n gàk*
3. *ńyɛɟ*
4. *kɔ́l*
5. *akɔɔ́ch, akɔń duɔń*
6. *akɔń ɟɛ́ɛ*
7. *áduɔ́ń*
8. *àlɟɔ́ɔ́r*
9. *àkɔ́l dìt*
10. *bɛ́l duɔń*
11. *bɛ́l ɟɛ́ɛ*
12. *lâl.*

8. The day-times.

wɔ́u è rùwɔ̀ the first morning-twilight becomes visible.
bɔr morning dawn
muɔ́l, mɔ́l morning;
feń fa muɔl "the earth is morning"; it is morning.
dè chàń noon.
cháń yà màl the sun is in the zenith.
chań a kɟchɟ the sun begins to sink, after noon.
bɔ́ɣɔ̀ afternoon;
feń fa b. it is afternoon.
a dɪ́kɟ wɔ́u the sun is setting.
wɔń ɟyɛ́ɛ́ɔ̀ the sun has set.
feń fa wɔr it is night;
kɟ wɔr at night, midnight.

Part II

THE SOCIAL ORGANISATION, POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND MAIN CULTURAL FEATURES OF THE NILOTES

INTRODUCTION

The structure and organisation of the Nilotic tribal groups, though showing similarities in many respects and suggesting a certain degree of progressive variation from one or two structural types, cannot be considered in one descriptive whole owing to the complexity of the subject. It is therefore proposed to consider the main Nilotic groups in turn and in conclusion to point out some of the features common to all.

Except where specifically mentioned, the information relating to a people applies to their indigenous organisation.

THE SHILLUK

GENERAL

The Shilluk live in a number of hamlets and settlements which, almost without a break, line the west bank of the White Nile from about 11°N. Lat. to Lake No in the south. There are also a few settlements on the east bank and along the lower reaches of the Sobat river.

They are predominantly agricultural and sedentary, owning comparatively few cattle. The long river frontage of their habitat gives them adequate water and grazing in the dry season for the few cattle they do possess. There are no large scale transhumant movements in the dry season to find cattle pastures. Only youths go into dry season cattle camps which are situated mainly on islands in the river or in dry water-courses near it. The cultivations are likewise nearby, either in the settlement area or inland a short distance away. Ecological conditions therefore enable the people to remain in the same place all the year round and render the settlement areas self-contained economically.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE

TERRITORIAL DIVISIONS AND KINSHIP UNITS

The Homestead (gol)

The *gol* is the smallest social unit in the tribe and usually consists of about two huts encircled by a fence. Every married man has a *gol* which he occupies with his wife, or wives, and children. In addition

5:Lienhardt E-4 (no date) 1954 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

ornaments—which are among the royal emblems of the Shilluk at the present day, and are given to a new king at his installation.[1] The crossing of the river and the fight with the Sun seem to be occurrences of great imaginative importance for the Shilluk, as they are for the Western Dinka, in whose mythology they appear in a different form, and by whom they are associated, though in different ways, with a mythical leader who in many ways resembles Nyikang. It may be mentioned that the sun, in Shilluk country, seems to be at its hottest at the end of the dry season, just before the rains, and its heat is in a sense overcome when the rains fall. Nyikang is believed to bring the rain, and in that sense still revives his people by sprinkling them with water. At this time, too, those who have been herding cattle for the dry season on islands in the river or in pastures on the east bank of the Nile, must return to their homes on the west bank to cultivate, crossing the river in order to do so. The subduing of the Sun, and the crossing of the river by Nyikang and his followers, thus recur in different form in the lives of the Shilluk. They still have to take their cattle to pasture across the river during the dry season, and return home with them when the rains start. Westermann says that:

> The Shilluks along the White Nile cross over to the east bank; likewise the cattle of the Sobat Shilluks descend to the lagoons south of the Sobat. So in both cases they have to cross the rivers, which is, on account of the many crocodiles living in them, not undangerous, and is therefore done with much care and accompanied by weighty ceremonies in order to keep the crocodiles away; this forms an important part of the duties of the witch-doctor.[2]

In the account he gives of such a river crossing, it is said that the cattle are led behind ambatch canoes which the Shilluk use.[3] It will be remembered that the effigy of the 'crosser of the river', Nyikang, used in the installation ceremonies for the king is also made of ambatch.[4] Nyikang is important for that crossing on which the Shilluk herds depend for their grazing. In another Shilluk text Nyikang asks his mother, Nyakaya, to dry up the river in order to help his people against foreign enemies.[5]

In the stories here summarized, Nyikang, the leader and first king of the Shilluk, is able to affect celestial phenomena—he may also raise winds and bring rain—and he divides the river to lead his people across. By agnatic descent he is linked either with a man from heaven or with a special creation of God, and through his mother, Nyakaya, he is linked with the river. He is also the leader by whom the Shilluk were first differentiated as a separate people, and who gave them their present land. His praise-names and titles of honour acknowledge and record his association with sky, river, and earth. Apart from those already mentioned, he has the names 'heaven'

[1] Crazzolara, 1950, p. 39.
[2] Westermann, 1912, Introduction, xxix–xxx.
[3] Ibid., p. 172.
[4] Thomson, 1948, p. 159. This is a correction of Howell and Thomson, 1946, where it is said that the effigy of Nyikang was made of bamboo, like that of his son Dak.
[5] Hofmayr, 1925, p. 55.

15: Oyler M-5 (ca. 1918) 1926 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

will get her a calf-skin. The mother of the girl is supposed to tie the calf-skin the first time the girl wears it to a dance. If her mother is dead, then a woman the same age as her mother ties it for her.

Some Begging Customs of the Women.

The Shilluk women seem to derive much pleasure from begging for cattle from some of the richer men of the tribe. The occasion is made a holiday for the women of the village, and they go forth in their finest clothes. If the recipient of their honour lives at some distance, the start is made early in the morning, and all the women of the village go. If there are too many women in the village, then the women of a certain age go. The women of two different villages will not unite to go on these expeditions. The proper season for these begging dances is just before the rains begin, though they may be held any time during the dry season.

The women decide upon the man to be honoured by their party before they start. Occasionally, they honour a man from their own village, but in that case they only ask for a sheep. Often they go five or six miles, and sometimes they go as far as fifteen or twenty miles. While they are gone the men must stay at home to care for the babies. Often, on such occasions, a mother will leave a tiny baby at home for the whole day. Usually, they object to leaving their babies at home, but for this event it is different.

The man to be honoured is not warned, lest he hide from them. Should the man they are seeking be absent from the village, the women hang a string of beads made from the shell of the ostrich egg (rek) in the enclosure between his two houses. When he returns, he says, "Who brought this rek?" His wife replies, "The women brought it." He asks, "What do they want?" His wife replies, "An ox." His wife says "They will return." He says, "They will find nothing." His wife replies, "So many should have something, I have children, so many women should not be refused by red lips." When the women return they usually get the ox.

Before the women start on such a trip they choose a leader, unless they already have one. She is called a baña. She has the powers of a magistrate. If any trouble occurs among the women, she acts as judge. She is crowned with the rek, as the chief of the village is crowned. In

17: Pumphrey G-5 (1934-1938) 1941
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

CHAPTER II.
SOCIAL STRUCTURE.

INTRODUCTION.

361 [101] [221] [883] Unlike their neighbours the Dinka and the Nuer the Shilluk have become entirely sedentary. They have a long river frontage in proportion to the population and there is therefore no necessity for an annual migration for summer grazing. In the summer the cattle are taken across to islands and the youths accompanying them build temporary cattle camps, but in no case is a village periodically entirely deserted.

[101] 614 631 Thus the Shilluk lack what for example the Dunjol Dinka living opposite them receive, namely an annual refresher course in clan organisation. The Dunjol Dinka village organisation disintegrates in the summer and the clans to a large extent reform for summer grazing. No such periodical reformation takes place with the Shilluk and consequently the clan organisation is more masked by the growth of territorial administrative units. Had the territorial unit, superimposed by years of the sedentary habit, obliterated completely the clan-organisation the administration of the tribe would be relatively simple. But Shilluk conservatism causes them to remain profoundly clan-conscious, and if to-day after some four hundred years of the sedentary state the tribe were for some reason to revert to nomadic habits there is no doubt that the clans would instantly reform.

621 182 721 The territorial system has evolved as the result of the grouping together of neighbouring hamlets, largely for purposes of defence against other groups, into what will be termed "settlements."

THE CLAN (KWAR).

614 *Kwar* (meaning literally "descendants"), followed by the name of the ancestor in question, is the Shilluk equivalent of clan. *Kwar* Okel designates all patrilineal descendants of Okel. Often the ancestor is mythical. There may be some hundred recognised clans in the tribe. But though every one knows to which clan he belongs, and although the clan entire continues to be an exogamous unit, it has ceased to possess for practical purposes any corporate unity. It

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

or Greek merchant and purchase one imported from England.

The most important and busiest months in the Shilluk year are those of the rainy season, from June to November. When the first rains fall, the villagers go out to prepare their fields for planting. The main plantations are generally at a considerable distance from the village, sometimes as much as ten miles inland; the small patches of maize and millet around the villages, usually cultivated by the women, are for a quick crop that can be used as soon as it is ripe. After the first few showers the grass is burnt and the ashes left to be washed into the soil. When enough rain has fallen to soften the ground, planting begins. There is no preliminary back-breaking hoeing or digging; the Shilluk would regard as crazy anyone who would suggest that such a thing was necessary or would improve the land. He would say that if the rains are good and all other circumstances favourable to growth, he will get enough grain to last him for the year, whereas if fortune is adverse, all the digging in the world will not fill his store basket. What was good enough for his fathers away back to the time of Nyikang is good enough for him; why should he try to improve on the wisdom of the ancients? If this particular patch was sufficient for his father and his father's father, why should he go to the trouble of clearing another? One of the Fathers in Lul, an expert and enthusiastic farmer, tried to convert the schoolboys to a better system of farming by showing them the benefits of digging and manuring the land. He divided an area of ground into two equal parts, planting one half according to the Shilluk and the other according to his own improved method; yet even the sight of the bumper crop that he obtained failed to impress the boys: it was not the Shilluk way of doing things and therefore not for them. And so, the husbandman with a sharp pointed stick removes a small divot from the unbroken surface, drops in a few millet seeds and pushes back the soil with his heel as he moves on. When the whole field has been sown in this manner, he is content to sit back and leave the rest to the beneficence of Nyikang,

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

about mid-October, and then the large heads of grain are cut off and stacked on tables to dry out before being loaded into baskets and carried off to the village by the women. The stalks are left standing in the fields to be collected when they are needed. For the time being, then, the Shilluk is contented, having plenty to eat and drink. If the harvest has not been too good, he still has enough food for the next six months, and beyond that he refuses to look. Why should he worry about next year when he might be dead by then? His wife, equally thriftless, will load her basket with the golden grain and set off to the nearest merchants, perhaps ten or fifteen miles away, to exchange it for a handful of piastres. She knows full well that before the next rains have even begun she will have to go back to the same merchant to buy back her grain at twice the price she was given for it, or watch her family struggle in semi-starvation for the remainder of the year, but that does not deter her from crossing the road from the grain store to the general store run by the same merchant and squandering her money on a few strings of beads, a few feet of copper wire, a small mirror or such other trifles.

In the new year, when the swamps and khors are draining back to the Nile and the tall grass is drying and yellowing under the fierce heat of the sun, it is time to think of re-building and re-thatching. A well-made house will stand the rigours of perhaps ten rainy seasons; a good thatched roof for two or three. After the roof has been renewed three times, the cracking and crumbling walls are beyond further patching up, and the house must be pulled down and rebuilt. Building is a community affair, and the builders are paid for their labour in beer, the brewing of large quantities of which is an essential preparation for the work.

If a new hut is to be built, a circle of about twelve feet in diameter is marked out on the ground and a shallow trench dug round the circumference. Stakes are driven into this every six inches, so that they stand four feet above the ground, and these are bound together by coarsely plaited grass ropes woven around and in and out from bottom to top.

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

a small hole for entrance, no Shilluk may dare to build himself, say, a square hut, or improve the light and ventilation of the traditional dwelling by putting in a window.

The Shilluk is a fine fisherman, adept in the use of harpoon, fishing spear and net. The harpoon he uses consists of a loose barbed head of iron which is fitted into the socket of a long bamboo pole to which it is attached by a length of thin but extremely strong twine. When a large fish is caught on the barb, it jerks the head from the socket, and is then played by the fisherman until he is able to finish it off with his fish spear. The spear itself is normally used in the shallows of the river or swamp; the man casts it repeatedly into the soft mud as he walks along, hoping to spear the mud fish which lie in great numbers under the surface.

The use of the net by an expert is a delightful thing to watch; the net is large, fine-meshed and circular in shape, weighted round the edge with pieces of lead. The fisherman gathers it in folds over one arm and casts it with a clean, effortless sweep; it falls lightly on the water in a perfect circle, sinks slowly to the bottom and then is slowly gathered in. If it is empty, it is folded and cast again with the same easy, graceful motion.

Fishing is done all the year round by individuals, but the real season is from March to May when the river and the large inland water-courses (the khors) are at their lowest level. During this time several villages will combine together to fish a certain khor, and as women as well as men join in, it becomes a real community effort. The day before that appointed for the fishing, men will go to the khor and block up its outlets, then on the day itself there is a general exodus from the villages, the men carrying harpoons and spears, and canoes if the river has to be crossed, the women carrying heavy nets, and cooking pots too if the start is early. Arrived at the khor, the women fix the nets on poles firmly pushed into the deep mud, side by side, right across one end, leaving no way of escape. The men line up abreast at the other end and move slowly towards the nets, thrusting into the mud